

Statement of Australia: Security Council Open Debate on the Maintenance of
International Peace and Security, Optimizing the Use of Preventive Diplomacy Tools:
Prospects and Challenges in Africa

16 July 2010

H.E. Mr. Andrew Goledzinowski Ambassador (Australia):

Australia welcomes this debate on preventive diplomacy with a focus on Africa. It seems particularly appropriate, Madam President, that you have gathered us here today in a week in which we gathered, just two floors above, to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, which was an historic and conspicuous failure of preventive diplomacy.

There is always the risk that, with the daily work of this Council necessarily focused on reacting to unfolding events and conflicts and on mandating peacekeeping missions to respond to such conflicts, we may lose sight of the key founding principle of this Organization, namely, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

Today's debate is a useful reminder of the importance of preventive action. It is perhaps a little clichéd, but prevention is better than cure, and we should do all the more collectively to take measures to prevent conflict, rather than wait for the need to mobilize a collective response to a conflict. The Council has an important role to play in this endeavour.

The Council has wide powers of investigation and recommendation in regard to the pacific settlement of disputes at its direct disposal under Chapter VI, including the ability to engage itself in the process of dispute resolution and to investigate situations and make appropriate recommendations. Arguably, these tools are not used often enough.

The Council has an important role to play in providing political support to the good offices role of the Secretary-General. The Council's statements are not just words, but rather a powerful signal of the will of the international community.

We have been pleased to be able to support the efforts to strengthen the Secretariat's ability to service the Secretary-General's good offices role through the provision of financial support to the Department of Political Affairs (DPA). We have also been pleased to support the crisis prevention work of the United Nations Development Programme, recognizing that the challenge of conflict prevention requires a collective effort of multiple agencies. It remains a concern, however, that this work falls to be funded under voluntary contributions, when it is central to the mandate of the United Nations. We should redouble our efforts to ensure that the DPA's strength and ability to respond rapidly in conflict prevention situations is adequate.

The Council has a further role to play in supporting the preventive diplomacy efforts of

regional organizations, as outlined by the representative of the Gambia just a few moments ago. Regional organizations have an important role in the prevention of conflicts, just as much as in responding to them. Systems for early conflict resolution and better early warning mechanisms on emerging crises can often be more alert and more robust at the regional level. A strong organic relationship between the United Nations and regional organizations, at both the regional level and here in New York, must be an essential part of our regional and global approach to conflict prevention.

The African Union (AU) is to be commended for its tireless efforts to establish its own peace and security framework, with preventive diplomacy at its core. Subregional organizations in Africa have similar, mutually supportive structures. Australia supports, in its own modest way, the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and the AU to develop the AU conflict prevention and peacekeeping capacity at both the strategic and operational levels, and we welcome the recent decision to create a United Nations Office to the AU in Addis Ababa. We have been pleased to contribute to United Nations initiatives aimed at strengthening the relationship between the AU and the United Nations and at developing more effective conflict-prevention mechanisms in Africa at both the regional and the subregional levels. The establishment of the United Nations Office in Addis Ababa should create greater synergies and efficiencies in the United Nations-AU relationship, including in relation to conflict prevention activities.

We witnessed the effective interplay of the subregional, regional and global systems in response to the events that unfolded in Guinea last September. The Economic Community of West African States, the AU, the Council and the United Nations more broadly responded in unison to the unfolding events in Guinea in a manner that effectively diffused tensions and restored that country back to the path of democracy. This was a telling illustration of how the system can work to effectively prevent the escalation of tensions.

Central to an effective system of conflict prevention is awareness of the situation, the ability to analyse that information and the political will to take action when needed. DPA plays an important role in collating and analysing the necessary information. In extreme situations, the proposed joint office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and for the Responsibility to Protect, the creation of which we support, should serve to alert the United Nations system to emerging mass atrocity situations. It then becomes a question of political will.

The Council needs to open itself up more to receiving briefings from DPA and other parts of the Secretariat on unfolding situations, and the broader membership needs to support such Council engagement. Despite some improvements and the use of some innovative meeting formats, too often the Council still appears deaf to calls to be briefed on unfolding situations. If the Council is overly conservative in its approach to what is or is not a threat to international peace and security, it will inevitably relegate itself to the role of responding to conflict, rather than seeking to prevent it. This will mean that the Council will have failed the test set for it and for all of us in the opening paragraph of the United Nations Charter.

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